

Spending up 22 percent in capital budget plan

■ School system gets 95 percent of request in Leggett's proposal

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County Executive Isiah Leggett called for a 22 percent increase in county spending to build classrooms and improve schools in the capital budget he presented to the County Council on Tuesday.

"It will squeeze an awful lot out of other county projects," Leggett told council members, explaining that other agencies will have to "defer, delay and reduce" building projects for an overall reduction of about 9.1 percent.

But he said it recognizes that the county's "most important priority is education."

Leggett's recommendation, a \$212.7 million increase, would give 95 percent of the nearly \$1.5 billion request the Board of Education is seeking for the next six years. And it would have the county borrow \$30 million more than the \$150 million that the council approved as affordable.

Leggett's capital plan assumes the county would borrow \$300 million annually for six years, and his staff says that follows guidelines the council set in the fall.

His recommendation comes as both county and state governments are struggling to find money in a poor economy. The prospects for holding onto, much less increasing, state aid are not promising for Maryland counties and cities.

Leggett's plan assumes the county will get \$250 million over six years from the state to build schools.

While Leggett's proposal would give the school system everything it requested for the coming year, it will require the schools to find savings and adjust plans in the following three years, he said.

The school system needs to look at better and more cost effective plans for

modernizing facilities, particularly high schools, he said.

Although the council has final say over the county's budget, Leggett warned that the capital improvements plan he presented is tautly constructed and cannot withstand major changes.

Council president Michael Knapp said he agrees that the county needs to take a closer look at expensive projects "like high school renovations that cost \$100 million."

"Once you start paying that you can't do anything else," said Knapp (D-Dist. 2) of Germantown.

The budget proposal holds to Leggett's support for relocating the Public Safety Training Academy and doing only preliminary planning and design work on a judicial center annex until it can be integrated into plans to consolidate county agencies in Rockville's core.

Projects in Leggett's plan include:

- Funding to modernize traffic signals and improve traffic flow Funds to support doubling the number of riders on county buses by 2020, including planning and buying land for a new maintenance depot.

- Continued funding to build a new Silver Spring transit center.

- Doubling funds for resurfacing and replacing rural roads.

- An almost 25 percent increase in spending to better manage stormwater runoff and improve stream water quality.

- Funding to design and construct a new animal shelter near Muncaster Mill and Airpark roads.

- Full funding for the Rockville Science Center project for Montgomery College.

- Continued funding for new or replacement fire stations in Clarksburg, East and West Germantown, Travilah and Takoma Park.

- Full funding to complete the 6th District Police Station in Gaithersburg.